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Excerpt from a radio talk by
W. W. Vincent, Chief, Western District,
Food and Drug Administration, U. S.
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HOW TO READ THE LABEL

Poultry

They used to ship a lot of cull poultry to market. Let me tell you something about the cull poultry business back in 1928. The bulk of poultry that goes to the table trade is of superior quality. In the poultry dressing establishments, they sort out what are known as culls. These culls are supposed to consist of edible fowl of inferior quality, such as birds that might have been poorly bled in dressing, or very thin fowls, or specimens too unsightly for table use because of bruised flesh and torn skins. In 1928, many birds that were diseased were included with the culls. Your Federal food and drug inspectors found a certain chicken canning establishment that used a large quantity of this cull poultry. A comprehensive survey of the poultry business by the Food and Drug Administration immediately followed. Before the year 1928 was over, there had been seized under the Federal food and drugs act in our Central and Eastern Districts a total of 96 different lots of inedible poultry. Some had been destroyed voluntarily by dealers in whose possession it was found and over 86 lots were confiscated by cooperating local officials. The amount seized in our Eastern District totaled 256,637 pounds.

This was a serious situation. How had it developed? Competition among buyers had resulted in a practice of accepting lots of chickens irrespective of the condition of the individual birds. The killing houses could sell anything then--so killing-house operators took the cull birds out of the fattening coops. They slaughtered them immediately. They included these with the other fowls which, because of age, bruises or deformities, went to make up the "cull" grade. There was one nice thing about the business. The adventurers in the business made it easy for your food and drug agents to detect these questionable birds. The operators packed the "culls" in barrels, while poultry suitable for table use went into boxes.

But in a short time, leaders of the industry recognized that such business, if continued, would destroy the poultry industry. A meeting of commercial interests was held. Poultry packers, shippers and distributors from widely separated territories attended. This conference adopted resolutions condemning the shipment of inedible poultry, and also the receipt of inedible poultry by poultry killing plants.

The U. S. Department of Agriculture, in an effort to assist the industry, offered, through the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, to furnish chicken canning establishments with a regular inspection service at their plants. Today, the majority of the large canning plants handling chicken have this inspection service. Under this inspection, each individual bird is examined when it is drawn or eviscerated and those not satisfactory for use are destroyed. This is but one development resulting from the enforcement of your Federal food and drugs act. The products which have been packed under government-inspection bear a label declaration which reads "Inspected and Certified by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture."

The Bureau of Agricultural Economics is grading and certifying fresh dressed turkeys in our western markets this holiday season. You may purchase government-graded birds.

"U. S. Prime" turkeys are the highest grade. They will take a blue label.

"U. S. Choice" turkeys are the second best. They will take a red label.

"U. S. Mediums" are third, and will have a green label.

All of these are good edible turkeys and they will have a label on them, telling you just what grade they are, together with what sex and what age.

You should know what these grades mean. In order for a young turkey to grade "U. S. Prime", it must be soft-meat and tender, with a broad, full-fleshed breast, and with the back, hips and pin bones fully covered with fat. It must be practically free from pin feathers, its crop empty, and bear no blemishes or dressing defects. On account of the very strict grading requirements necessary for a bird to be put in this grade, only about 10% of the poultry coming to the market will grade as high as "U. S. Prime."

To grade "U. S. Choice" the birds may be well fleshed, instead of "full-fleshed" as in the "Prime" grade; they must be well bled, the same as in the "Prime" grade, the crop must be empty, and the bird will have only a few scattered pin feathers. This grade of poultry is the highest grade that is coming on the market in commercial quantities and the housewife will make no mistake and will not be disappointed in buying a bird that is graded "U. S. Choice."

The "U. S. Medium" grade is a bird that is not so well fleshed as the two higher grades, although it must be fairly well fleshed, and must be fairly well covered with fat. There may be a broken wing or a broken leg, providing it is not bruised. It may have a few scattered pin feathers over

the entire carcass. The crop may contain not over four ounces of feed. There may be a few skin bruises or abrasions as long as they do not expose a considerable quantity of the meat.

The fourth grade is "U. S. Common." It is the lowest grade. Birds in this grade may be poorly fleshed, providing they do not show emaciation. Advanced emaciation of a bird is evidence of disease. Such a bird is not of any grade recognized by the government. Any condition that would render a turkey unwholesome for food would not be allowed in the "U. S. Common" grade. The bird may, however, have numerous pin feathers. It may have two or more broken bones, providing they are not too badly bruised and showing blood clots, and may be somewhat poorly bled. The crop may not contain over eight ounces of feed. You will not encounter any turkeys labeled this grade in your retail markets.

Through representatives of the Dairy and Poultry Products Division of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, I am informed that the grading service offered by that Bureau will be available shortly on chickens throughout the country. Now that will please a lot of you folks. Think of the satisfaction of buying a chicken, with the Government grade label right on it--- a grade that you know is honest, and tells you just what you are getting. You see, labels are becoming more important. Soon you will be able to buy government graded chickens as well as turkeys.

